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**Immigration and the Common Profit:
Native Cloth Workers, Flemish Exiles, and Royal Policy
in Fourteenth-Century London**

Introduction: The Massacre of the Flemings

At the end of May 1381, disagreements about the payment of the royal poll tax in the English county of Essex sparked off a violent uprising that would soon spread across other parts of the country and would become known as the Peasants' Revolt.¹ On 13 June, the rebels, now coming from a wide range of social backgrounds and motivated by various grievances, entered the city of London and attacked several symbols of royal and other authority. The next day, Friday 14 June, the Flemish community living in the capital was ferociously massacred. The bloodshed was recorded soon afterwards and in later accounts both by chroniclers and in administrative sources such as the letter books of the city of London.² Their reports are remarkably unanimous and allow us to reconstruct the main course of events on that fateful Friday: following several isolated incidents involving Flemish residents in

¹ The bibliography on the revolt is extensive. A good introduction is *The English Rising of 1381*, eds. Rodney H. Hilton and T. Aston (Cambridge, 1984). An overview of the most relevant primary sources is given in Richard B. Dobson, ed., *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381* (London, 1983).

² For the most detailed accounts, see V.H. Galbraith, ed., *The Anonimale Chronicle, 1333 to 1381: From a MS. Written at St Mary's Abbey, York* (Manchester, 1927), 145; L.C. Hector and Barbara F. Harvey, eds., *The Westminster Chronicle, 1381-1394* (Oxford, 1982), 6-9; John Taylor, Wendy R. Childs, and Leslie Watkiss, eds., *The St Albans Chronicle: The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2002-2011), 1: 430-1; Henry T. Riley, ed., *Memorials of London and London Life in the XIIIth, XIVth, and XVth Centuries* (London, 1868), 450.

Southwark and Holborn the day before and earlier on the same day, thirty-five to forty Flemings were dragged out of churches and houses in the city's Vintry Ward, near the Thames, and were summarily beheaded.

Unfortunately, none of the medieval authors elaborated on the attackers' reasons for turning against the Flemings. As even the most concise amongst the commentators found it necessary to highlight that all victims originated from Flanders, it seems safe to assume that they did not end up being accidental casualties of an angry mob but were specifically targeted. According to one fifteenth-century chronicler, the perpetrators used the inability to pronounce the shibboleth "bread and cheese" to single out Flemish people.³ It is, however, difficult to relate the murder of this specific group to the more general concerns that inspired the participants in the Peasants' Revolt, centered upon the abolition of villeinage, the specifics of English labor legislation, and the right to rent land at low rates. In a recent study, Erik Spindler claimed that the rebels asserted their English identity by opposing and violently excluding those who were nearest to, but different from them, the Flemings.⁴ Len Scales drew on the contemporary silence about the motivations of the 1381 murderers to argue that the idea of eradicating other ethnic groups was much more central to, and evident in, medieval thought than we assume, and therefore did not need additional explanation.⁵

The most widely accepted views on the massacre of June 1381 are those that take into account the economic context of the Flemish presence in fourteenth-century London. Already

³ Charles L. Kingsford, ed., *Chronicles of London* (Oxford, 1905), 15.

⁴ Erik Spindler, "Flemings in the Peasants' Revolt, 1381," in *Contact and Exchange in Later Medieval Europe: Essays in Honour of Malcolm Vale*, eds. Hannah Skoda, Patrick Lantschner and R.J.L. Shaw (Woodbridge, 2012), 59-78.

⁵ Len Scales, "Bread, Cheese and Genocide: Imagining the Destruction of Peoples in Medieval Western Europe," *History* 92, no. 307 (July 2007): 284-300.

in 1898, in his introduction to André Réville's unfinished work on the Great Rising, Charles Petit-Dutaillis suggested that the victims in Vintry Ward were weavers from the Low Countries living and working in the city. The perpetrators would have been London's native cloth workers, dissatisfied with the competition of the newcomers from abroad.⁶ In his *Bond Men Made Free*, Rodney Hilton further developed Petit-Dutaillis' views adopting a class conflict perspective. The attack could have been orchestrated by either English master weavers jealous of the privileges bestowed upon their alien counterparts or English apprentices and journeymen at daggers drawn with their Flemish masters.⁷ In their wake, many others have argued that the onslaught was made on Flemish textile workers, whose presence had jeopardized the livelihoods of the city's English artisans.⁸ Even though none of the medieval sources allows further identification of the victims and their aggressors, it is important to know that London's native and alien cloth workers had a history of often violent opposition. Between 1337 and 1381, proclamations ordering the English weavers to stop molesting their Flemish colleagues had been issued on at least seven occasions.⁹ No carnage

⁶ André Réville, *Le Soulèvement des Travailleurs d'Angleterre en 1381* (Paris, 1898), xlvii-viii.

⁷ Rodney H. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (London, 1973), 195-8.

⁸ Caroline M. Barron, *Revolt in London, 11th to 15th June 1381* (London, 1981), 6; Caroline M. Barron, "Introduction: England and the Low Countries, 1327-1477," in *England and the Low Countries*, eds. Caroline M. Barron and Nigel Saul (New York, 1995), 1-28, at 13; Alastair Dunn, *The Great Rising of 1381* (Stroud, 2002), 90. Alerted by a shockingly trivializing comment on the events by Geoffrey Chaucer in the Nun's Priest's Tale, Derek Pearsall concluded that the assault was the result of both the economic rivalry between native and Flemish craftsmen and the fear of a foreign military invasion. Derek A. Pearsall, "Strangers in Late Fourteenth-Century London," in *The Stranger in Medieval Society*, eds. F.R.P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden (Minneapolis, MN, and London, 1997), 46-62, at 58.

⁹ A first proclamation was made in 1337. Reginald R. Sharpe, ed., *Calendar of Letter-Books Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall: Letter-Book F* (London, 1904)

of the kind that took place during the Peasants' Revolt had been reported, but if we are to believe a petition submitted by the alien cloth workers in 1377-8, these attacks had equally resulted in the loss of Flemish lives.¹⁰

This article revisits the economic arguments advanced by Hilton and others and considers them in their full political context. It examines why, if feelings of frustration existed among native weavers about the presence of Flemish competitors and the privileges they received, these would have escalated into anti-alien violence, both in 1381 and earlier. Throughout the fourteenth century, Parliament provided a political forum where issues like these could be addressed. The London trade and craft guilds, including the guild of native weavers, were very active in petitioning the Crown to take action on a wide array of matters.¹¹ Why would they not have brought their dissatisfaction with the Flemish cloth workers before Parliament? If they did, why was the Crown unable to deal with their requests in a satisfactory way or, at least, in a way that defused the situation? Although the rivalry between English and Flemish weavers in London has been the subject of several studies, no author so far has convincingly accounted for the role of the monarch in the continuous disputes. Whereas most historians have acknowledged that, at times, the king privileged alien over native cloth

(henceforth *LBF*), 190. New instructions followed in 1339 and 1344. *Calendar of Close Rolls* (henceforth *CCR*), 1339-41, 103; 1343-6, 486. The authorities intervened again in 1355 and twice in 1359. Reginald R. Sharpe, ed., *Calendar of Letter-Books Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall: Letter-Book G* (London, 1905) (henceforth *LBG*), 109, 112, 150. A final proclamation was issued in 1369. *CCR*, 1369-74, 91. All instances are discussed further in this article.

¹⁰ Petition Alien Weavers of London, 1377-8, Ancient Petitions, SC 8/143/7122, The National Archives (henceforth TNA). The full content and context of the petition are analyzed below.

¹¹ Matthew Davies, "Lobbying Parliament: The London Livery Companies in the Fifteenth Century," *Parliamentary History* 23, no. 1 (February 2004): 136-48; Ian Archer, "The London Lobbies in the Later Sixteenth Century," *Historical Journal* 31, no. 1 (March 1988): 17-44.

workers, none has recognized the consistency in the Crown's position during the three decades that preceded the events of 1381.¹² We shall argue that, throughout most of the fourteenth century, the native weavers in London were facing a government that was not an unprejudiced mediator in a dispute between two groups of craftsmen, but an interested party with an original and well-developed perspective on the role of alien-born skilled artisans in key sectors of the English economy. That perspective was both the cause of the friction and the reason why a solution through the usual channels of political communication was so hard to reach. What follows, in other words, is not only an account of a conflict between different groups of workers in fourteenth-century London, but also an analysis of a crucial episode in the development of the royal government's economic policy and in its relationship with both its native and alien populations.

¹² Jonathan Good stressed that Edward III encouraged the immigration of alien textile workers, but failed to see the constant preferment throughout the ensuing disputes. Jonathan Good, "The Alien Clothworkers of London, 1337-1381," in *The Ties that Bind: Essays in Medieval British History in Honor of Barbara Hanawalt*, eds. Linda E. Mitchell, Katherine L. French and Douglas L. Biggs (Farnham, 2001), 7-20. William Ashley did observe that the government systematically favored the immigrant weavers, but ended his analysis at the start of the 1350s, three decades before the Peasants' Revolt. William James Ashley, *An Introduction to English Economic History and Theory: Part II, The End of the Middle Ages* (London, 1910), 198-9. In her 1933 book on the London weavers' company, Frances Consitt was aware of "the king's continued goodwill" towards the Flemish textile workers during the 1360s and 1370s, but never elaborated on the reasons for privileging them. Frances Consitt, *The London Weavers' Company* (Oxford, 1933), 17. May McKisack also admitted that "Edward III consistently protected the aliens against the hostility of the native cloth workers", but explicitly doubted the possibility of a more considered underlying policy on the part of the Crown. May McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century, 1307-1399* (Oxford, 1959), 368.

The Crown's New Immigration Policy

The English Crown had first felt the need to consider a more systematic approach towards those living within its borders but born overseas at the end of the preceding century. In 1294, the relative harmony that had characterized the relationship between the houses of Plantagenet and Capet for several decades came to an end and disagreements about the feudal status of Aquitaine escalated into open Anglo-French warfare.¹³ As a result, the government was forced to address the potential threat to national security posed by the significant numbers of French people resident in England. Its response was uncompromising: the property of all Frenchmen, as well as those under the suzerainty of the French king, such as Flemings and Bretons, was confiscated. Restitutions were allowed only in selected cases and after years of often protracted proceedings. Causing severe economic disruption across the whole realm, the campaign revealed how deeply rooted into English society the alien visitors really were and inspired the Crown to be more circumspect when dealing with the issue in the future. When war with France broke out again in 1328, the government still took actions against French interests in England, but also issued so-called letters of protection to alleviate the harshness of the measures for as many people as possible. Probably under pressure from the localities, Westminster ceased to consider immigrant residents solely as a security threat and came to appreciate the economic benefits which many of them could bring to English society. Even though new hostilities with France from 1337 onwards presented the Crown with much more serious concerns than the campaigns in 1294 and 1328 had done, the consequences for the

¹³ For the wars between England and France during this period, see Malcolm G.A. Vale, *The Origins of the Hundred Years War: The Angevin Legacy, 1250-1340* (Oxford, 1996).

French, and for other immigrants, in England were minimal, and would continue to be so for the remainder of the Hundred Years' War.¹⁴

In concert with its attempts to preserve and safeguard the immigrant contribution to the English economy, the government also embarked on a more active immigration policy. From the 1330s onwards, Edward III tried to attract skilled artisans from abroad in order to boost the development of local industries, most notably the cloth industry. The same protections that were used to exempt alien residents from the effects of the wartime measures were now granted either to individual cloth workers or to groups of craftsmen who came from Flanders, Brabant, and, occasionally, Zeeland, regions with a well-established high-quality drapery industry, and who wished to ply their trade in England. The Chancery delivered letters to weavers in York and St Ives (Huntingdonshire) in 1336 and 1338 and to a dyer and his entourage in Winchester in 1337.¹⁵ Also in 1337, a statute was passed that invited textile workers from all foreign parts and promised them all the legal franchises they would need.¹⁶ Here, too, evidence suggests that the Crown's policy, if not initiated at the request of the local communities in the first place, at least received the approval of a substantial part of the English population. In 1333, the Commons in Parliament petitioned Edward to protect the alien cloth workers from arrest and prosecution, so that they could "teach the people of this land to work the cloth."¹⁷ Not everyone within the realm however was as enthusiastic as the parliamentary representatives. In 1337, the king had to order the citizens of London to stop

¹⁴ Bart Lambert and W. Mark Ormrod, "A Matter of Trust: The Royal Regulation of England's French Residents during Wartime, 1294-1360," *Historical Research* 89, no. 244 (May 2016): 208-26.

¹⁵ *Calendar of Patent Rolls* (hereafter *CPR*), 1334-8, 341, 431, 500; 1338-40, 13.

¹⁶ *Statutes of the Realm*, 11 vols. (London, 1810-28), 1: 281.

¹⁷ C. Given-Wilson et al., eds., *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, 16 vols. (Woodbridge, 2005) (henceforth *PROME*), 4: 191.

injuring immigrant cloth workers.¹⁸ In 1339, a similar proclamation was issued.¹⁹ In 1344, the Crown even threatened to send those Londoners who were still attacking Flemish artisans to Newgate prison.²⁰ Outside the capital, only the weavers of York are known to have contested the immigration of textile workers from the Low Countries, in 1342.²¹ London's resistance did not lead Edward to abandon his policy, however. Protections for Flemish and Brabantine craftsmen continued throughout the 1340s.²² In 1351, the government even stepped up its efforts to attract alien skill in response to developments on the other side of the English Channel.

London and the Flemish Exiles

At the start of the Hundred Years' War, the Flemish count Louis of Nevers decided to honor his feudal obligations towards his suzerain, King Philip VI of France. His pro-French policy met with opposition from Flanders' politically powerful cities, whose all-important production of luxury cloth crucially depended on the import of high-quality English wool.²³ In Ghent, the county's most prominent urban center, the radical textile guilds led by James of Artevelde managed to gain control of the magistracy, after which similar regimes were installed in Bruges and Ypres. Together, the so-called "three cities" took over the government

¹⁸ *LBF*, 190.

¹⁹ *CCR*, 1339-41, 103.

²⁰ *CCR*, 1343-6, 486.

²¹ Petition Weavers of York, 1342, Ancient Petitions, SC 8/238/11890A, TNA.

²² See, for example, *CPR*, 1343-5, 115.

²³ In Ghent, a city with about 64,000 inhabitants, the cloth industry provided work to over 13,000 people in 1357. David Nicholas, *Metamorphosis of a Medieval City: Ghent in the Age of the Artevelde, 1302-1390* (Leyden, 1987), 19.

of the surrounding countryside and in 1339 they forced Louis of Nevers to leave the county. They forged an alliance with the English and, in 1340, recognized Edward III as suzerain and king of France. After 1345, however, following Artevelde's death and the absence of effective English support, the rebellious regime disintegrated and Nevers' son Louis of Male was able gradually to reconquer the county. In January 1349, a bloody battle in the streets of Ghent eliminated the last pockets of resistance.²⁴

With the intention of bringing those who had disputed his father's authority to justice, the new Flemish count launched an investigation.²⁵ In England, Edward III anticipated the potential persecution of hundreds of skilled artisans who had been involved in the revolt. In May 1350, he issued letters of protection to those Flemings who, following the failure of the rebellion, had emigrated to London, Canterbury, Norwich, Salisbury, Lynn, and other English cities and towns. Very similar to those granted to a number of French residents in England during the same years,²⁶ the documents qualified the Flemings as *incolas*, a term derived from Roman law to denote permanent inhabitants born outside the kingdom. As a reward for their loyalty during the Flemish conflict, they were allowed to live in the realm, to leave, enter and move around freely, and to trade their goods. Officers were instructed to protect them against

²⁴ Henry Stephen Lucas, *The Low Countries and the Hundred Years' War: 1326-1347* (Ann Arbor, 1929), 257-67, 339-47, 358-74, 438-55, 480-92, 516-27, 559-64; David Nicholas, *The van Arteveldes of Ghent: The Varieties of Vendetta and the Hero in History* (Leyden, 1988), 19-71.

²⁵ Thierry de Limburg Stirum, ed., *Cartulaire de Louis de Male, Comte de Flandre: Decreten van den Grave Lodewyck van Vlaenderen, 1348 à 1358*, 2 vols. (Bruges, 1898), 1: 78-9.

²⁶ Bart Lambert and W. Mark Ormrod, "Friendly Foreigners: International Warfare, Resident Aliens and the Early History of Denization in England, c. 1250-c. 1400," *English Historical Review* 130, no. 542 (February 2015): 1-24, at 8-14.

physical aggression and their property against confiscation.²⁷ One of those to whom Edward's letters applied was Peter Medinhoe the Elder, a weaver from Bruges. His name appears on the lists of military musters for his city's militia in 1340,²⁸ suggesting he must have been involved in the hostilities against the Flemish count. In August 1351, the mayor of London informed his Bruges colleagues that Medinhoe had died in the English capital.²⁹

In October 1351, Louis of Male's inquiry was concluded and those who had compromised themselves during the years of rebellion were permanently exiled from Flemish soil. Lists of those banished in 1351 and of those eligible for pardon drawn up in 1359 make clear that at least 1,364 people, most of whom came from Ghent, Bruges, and the rural district of the Liberty of Bruges, were convicted. Of the 316 exiles whose occupations were given, 137 were weavers, fifty-nine were fullers, and twenty-one belonged to the smaller drapery guilds.³⁰ Given the composition of the urban regimes between 1338 and 1349, it is probable that the majority of those without listed occupations were also textile workers. Confronted with the forced departure of such numbers of experienced cloth makers, Edward III was even

²⁷ The letters were not entered on the Chancery's patent rolls but were recorded in an inspeximus confirmation by London's Court of Husting in 1364. Confirmation Letters Patent Edward III, 1364, CLA/023/DW/93/19, London Metropolitan Archives (henceforth LMA). For the context of the confirmation, see *infra*.

²⁸ Jan Frans Verbruggen, *Het gemeenteleger van Brugge van 1338 tot 1340 en de namen van de weerbare mannen*, (Brussels, 1962), 111.

²⁹ Reginald R. Sharpe, ed., *Calendar of Letters from the Mayor and Corporation of the City of London, circa A.D. 1350-1370, Enrolled and Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation at the Guildhall* (London, 1885), 19.

³⁰ Copy of List of Exiles and Enemies of the Count of Flanders, 1351, Cartulary Groenenboek C, fos. 110 r.-113 v., Bruges City Archives; List of Exiles and Enemies of the Count of Flanders, 1351, Political Charters, 1st Series, 495, Bruges City Archives; List of Exiles Eligible for Pardon, 1359, Série B, 1596, fos. 30 r.-35 v., Lille, Archives Départementales du Nord, published in Napoleon De Pauw, ed., *Cartulaire Historique et Généalogique des Artevelde* (Brussels, 1920), 711-32.

more determined to capitalize on the diplomatic situation and its economic potential. On 25 September 1351, before the outcome of the investigation was made public, he issued new, more open-ended letters of protection, inviting all those who had been banished from Flanders and were willing to work to his kingdom.³¹

In spite of systematic evidence, it is hard to establish how many of those convicted accepted the offer and moved to England. A recent study has demonstrated that in the fifteen years following the exile, 126 immigrants from the Low Countries settled with their wives and children in the middle-sized town of Colchester in the county of Essex, possibly adding about 10 per cent to its population. At least twenty-seven of them figured on the lists of Flemish exiles in 1351. Most new arrivals were found working in the town's cloth production and the sale of textiles which, during the same decades, grew exponentially. In the thirty years that followed, no signs of anti-alien hostility were recorded.³²

The only other place in England where Edward III's letters of protection are known to have had a considerable impact is London.³³ The names of fifty-six exiles included in the 1351 lists of banishments match almost exactly with those of Flemish artisans who, according to the city's letter books, the memoranda and fine rolls, the aulnage accounts, and a variety of

³¹ *CPR, 1350-1354*, 147; Thomas Rymer, ed., *Foedera, Conventiones, Literae et Cujuscunque Generis Acta Publica*, 4 vols. (London, 1816-69), 3: 232.

³² Bart Lambert and Milan Pajic, "Drapery in Exile: Edward III, Colchester and the Flemings, 1351-1367," *History* 99, no. 338 (December 2014): 733-53.

³³ One exile, Coppin Issac from Diksmuide, was admitted to the freedom of Lynn in 1351. *A Calendar of the Freeman of Lynn, 1292-1836, Compiled from the Records of the Corporation of the Borough by Permission of the Town Clerk* (Norwich, 1913), 12. Banished Flemish weaver Lawrence Conync became a freeman of York in 1354. Francis Collins, ed., *Register of the Freeman of the City of York: Vol. I, 1272-1558*, Surtees Society no. 96 (Durham, 1897), 48. Another exile, Jan van Oostborch, was pardoned for the murder of a Brabanter in Norwich in 1355. *CPR, 1354-1358*, 284.

other sources,³⁴ were dwelling in the capital during the twenty-five years following the investigation (see table 1). Whereas some of the exiles in Colchester came from smaller Flemish towns and villages, nearly all of those found in London originated from the large cities of Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres. The only exceptions were Baldwin Giles and Lambert Funderlynde, who hailed from the small center of Poperinge. In thirty-six of the fifty-six cases, the Flemish lists of exiles provide us with an occupation. Only one of them, carpenter John de Gaunt from Bruges, had no connection to the textile sector. John de Langford and John Gallyn worked as a fuller; Lamsin Iperling was a shearer. The remaining thirty-one immigrants were all banished weavers. Many of the exiles in London had occupied key positions in Flanders during the years of the revolt. Levin Fisker had served as alderman of Ghent in 1343 and 1347, Levin Godhalse in 1348,³⁵ months before the city had fallen to the Flemish count. Giles Ripekast had been one of the city captains in Ghent,³⁶ John de

³⁴ Particulars of Account of Aulnage, 1375-6, 1376-7, E 101/340/22, m. 3; E 101/340/23, mm. 5, 5d, TNA; Particulars of Customs Accounts, 1365-6, E 122/70/18, mm. 1, 1d, 2, 9, TNA; Verdict King's Bench, 1357, KB 27/386, m. 75, TNA; Verdict Court of Common Pleas, 1353, CP 76, m. 15, LMA; Sharpe, *LBG*, 48, 104, 130, 115-19, 237, 250; Reginald R. Sharpe, ed., *Calendar of Letter-Books Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall: Letter-Book H* (London, 1907) (henceforth *LBH*), 77; A.H. Thomas, ed., *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1926-43) (henceforth *CPMR*), 1: 248; 2: 65-6, 67, 70, 195; Consitt, *London Weavers' Company*, 188-91; Riley, *Memorials*, 332; Sharpe, *Calendar of Letters from the Mayor*, 19, 75; *Calendar of Fine Rolls* (henceforth *CFR*), 1356-1368, 193.

³⁵ Napoleon De Pauw and Julius Vuylsteke, eds., *De Rekeningen der stad Gent: tijdvak van Jacob van Artevelde 1336-1349*, 3 vols. (Ghent, 1885), 2: 265, 3: 147, 273.

³⁶ Ripekast was one of the few who returned to Flanders after being pardoned in 1359. Paul Rogghé, "Gemeente ende Vrient: Nationale Omwentelingen in de XIVde eeuw," *Annales de la Société d'Emulation de Bruges* 89, no. 3-4 (1952) : 101-135, at 125.

Cranburgh in Bruges.³⁷ Lamsin de Vos was one of Bruges' most important drapers and had acted as dean of its weavers guild in 1347.³⁸ In the same year, John de Langford had been in charge of the city's fullers guild.³⁹ Exiles John Cockelar and Lamsin Iperling had sold large quantities of cloth and fabric for linings to the Bruges city government throughout the 1340s.⁴⁰ Unlike Colchester, London attracted the top layer of Flanders' reputed textile industry. Their prominent roles during the years of the rebellion had cost them most of their political leverage, but they brought economic and social capital with them to England.

Table 1: Names of Flemings appearing both in the London sources between 1351 and 1375 and on the lists of exiles of 1351 and those pardoned in 1359

Sometimes the London sources allow us to establish whether the Flemish exiles were accompanied by their wives and children. In 1353, Lamsin Iperling was sued together with his spouse Agnes in an intrusion case before the Court of Common Pleas.⁴¹ Only one exile, John Marchaunt of Ypres, figures on the 1351 lists with his wife. It does not necessarily follow that the others immigrated alone, as the case of Henry Clofhamer shows. Clofhamer, banished from Ghent, appears repeatedly in the London sources throughout the 1350s and 1360s.⁴² In 1359, his anonymous wife, who had never been mentioned before, was pardoned and recalled

³⁷ Expenses for Cloth and Lining, 1343-4, City Accounts, 1343-4, fol. 56 r., Bruges City Archives.

³⁸ As Ripegast, de Vos returned after 1359. Georges Espinas and Henri Pirenne, eds., *Recueil de documents relatifs à l'histoire de l'industrie drapière en Flandre : volume 2* (Brussels, 1906), 576 ; James M. Murray, *Bruges, Cradle of Capitalism, 1280-1390* (Cambridge, 2005), 287, 292.

³⁹ Charter of the Fullers Guild, 1347, Charters of the Craft Guilds, 1240, Bruges City Archives.

⁴⁰ Expenses for Cloth and Lining, 1343-4, 1344-5, City Accounts, 1343-4, fols. 56 v., 58 v., 61 v.; 1344-5, fols. 58 r., 63 r., Bruges City Archives.

⁴¹ Verdict Court of Common Pleas, 1353, CP 76, m. 15, LMA.

⁴² Verdict Court of Exchequer, 1352, E 13/76, mm. 97-98d, TNA; *CPMR*, 2: 65-6.

to Flanders,⁴³ which implies she had been in England during the previous years. In 1375, a Flemish weaver named Ralf Clofhamer appears in the London records,⁴⁴ possibly Henry's son. Levin Fisker's wife Merrin was also allowed to return to Ghent in 1359,⁴⁵ while her husband remained in the English capital.⁴⁶ It was stated earlier that Peter Medinhoe the Elder died in London before the formal sentence by the Flemish count. He appeared in the 1340 military musters of Bruges together with his son Peter Medinhoe the Younger.⁴⁷ Peter the Younger's name does figure on the lists of exiles of October 1351,⁴⁸ though no sources confirm he also moved to England. Some of the exiles in London, such as John and William Brunhals from Ghent or Jacob and John van Loo from Bruges, bear the same surnames and may have been related to each other. When John de Cranburgh was exiled in 1351, his wife Katherine stayed behind in Bruges. In 1354, the Bruges authorities refused to pay her a compensation for pulling down some of her husband's properties in the city without the latter's assent. John called on the mayor and aldermen of London, who informed their colleagues in Flanders of his approval.⁴⁹ Other banished Flemings in England still maintained contact with friends and relatives on the other side of the Channel as well. According to a

⁴³ De Pauw, *Cartulaire des Artevelde*, 715.

⁴⁴ *LBG*, 329.

⁴⁵ *Cartulaire des Artevelde*, 715.

⁴⁶ Particulars of Customs Accounts, 1365-6, E 122/70/18 m. 1, TNA.

⁴⁷ Verbruggen, *Het gemeenteleger van Brugge*, 111.

⁴⁸ List of Exiles and Enemies of the Count of Flanders, 1351, Political Charters, 1st Series, 495, Bruges City Archives.

⁴⁹ Sharpe, *Calendar of Letters from the Mayor*, 75.

verdict by the Ghent bench of aldermen, for example, John van Wetere received annual visits from Ghent money changer Feyns de Backer in his house in London at the end of the 1350s.⁵⁰

Evidence on where in London the Flemish exiles lived is limited. The plaint for intrusion brought against Lamsin Iperling and his wife in 1353 related to a free tenement in the parish of All Hallows Barking, in the city's Tower Ward.⁵¹ When Peter Medinhoe the Elder died in August 1351, he resided in the house of Maud Aleyn, a citizen of London, in St Botolph's parish in Billingsgate Ward, near the Thames.⁵² In 1362 Francis Fan Yabek stayed in the property of fellow exile John Kempe, whose location, unfortunately, was not specified.⁵³ At least from 1362 onwards, the Flemings held their congregations and hired apprentices in the churchyard of St Laurence Pountney in Candlewick Ward,⁵⁴ also the neighborhood where most of the city's drapers and native weavers lived and worked.⁵⁵ Cloth workers from Brabant, who migrated to London increasingly from the second half of the 1350s onwards, met in the churchyard of St Mary Somerset, in Queenhithe Ward.⁵⁶

The aulnage accounts, which record the payment of a fee for the measurement and sealing of woollen cloth, make clear that the Flemings in London focused on the production of rays, medium-quality fabrics with striped bands or checks dyed in the yarn, and coloreds,

⁵⁰ Verdict Aldermen of the Keure, 18 January 1360, Series 301: Registers of the Keure, volume 1, 1360-1, fol. 64 r., Ghent City Archives.

⁵¹ Verdict Court of Common Pleas, 1353, CP 76, m. 15, LMA.

⁵² Sharpe, *Calendar of Letters from the Mayor*, 19.

⁵³ *CFR*, 1356-1368, 193.

⁵⁴ Riley, *Memorials*, 345.

⁵⁵ John R. Oldland, "London Clothmaking, c. 1270-c. 1550" (PhD diss., University of London, 2003.), 33, 54.

⁵⁶ Riley, *Memorials*, 345.

the most expensive, heavily finished kind of cloth.⁵⁷ In 1374-1377, the only years for which particulars of account have survived for the capital, the separate membranes devoted to these types of textiles contain almost exclusively names of Flemish artisans.⁵⁸ Nine of them were people exiled from Flanders in 1351. John van Dorme, from Ypres, brought eight short ray cloths and two scarlets, the most luxurious kind of woollen dyed with kermes, to the aulnager on 13 December 1374. On 28 September 1376 he aulnaged nine short rays, and on 17 February 1377 he had another three rayed cloths sealed.⁵⁹ John Capelle, an exile from Ghent, paid the fee for six short rays on 12 October 1374 and for another eighteen rayed cloths six days later.⁶⁰ John van Loo took fourteen pieces of rayed cloth to the aulnager on 2 October 1376.⁶¹

It looks as if the Flemish arrivals in London operated their business on the same capitalist basis as they were accustomed to do in their home county.⁶² Eight of the exiles are referred to in the London sources as either merchants or merchant-drapers. John Kempe, John de Cranburgh and Jacob van Ackere acquired citizenship, which, according to London's charter granted by Edward II in 1319, was required in order to trade retail in the city.⁶³ The amounts of fabric the Flemings aulnaged were consistently very high and exceeded the

⁵⁷ For the different ranges of cloth on the London market, see John R. Oldland, "London Clothmaking, c. 1270-c. 1550" (PhD diss., University of London, 2003.), 24-5, 59-60.

⁵⁸ Particulars of Account of Aulnage, 1374-6, 1376-7, E 101/340/ 22, m. 3; E 101/340/23, mm. 5, 5d, TNA.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Particulars of Account of Aulnage, 1374-6, E 101/340/ 22, m. 3, TNA.

⁶¹ Particulars of Account of Aulnage, 1376-7, E 101/340/23, m. 5, TNA.

⁶² For the organization of the Flemish cloth industry, see Peter Stabel, "Guilds in Late Medieval Flanders: Myths and Realities of Guild Life in an Export-Oriented Environment," *Journal of Medieval History* 30, no. 2 (June 2004): 187-212, at 208-9.

⁶³ Walter de Gray Birch, ed., *The Historical Charters and Constitutional Documents of the City of London* (London, 1887), 46-7.

capacities of individual weavers, whose average output during this period ranged between ten and fifteen cloths a year.⁶⁴ By contrast, the other types of woollens recorded in 1374-7 were invariably brought to the aulnager by large numbers of English fullers in much smaller quantities.⁶⁵ Given the elevated economic status of many immigrants before their banishment, it is likely that some of them possessed the capital to organize the whole production process and subcontracted stages of the work to their fellow Flemings or their families. The presence of only two fullers and the absence of dyers among the exiles suggests they must have entrusted the finishing stages to local workers, whilst marketing the finished product themselves.

The Flemish exiles in London settled in a place with strongly established links with the Low Countries⁶⁶ and which was soon to become the most important cloth market in the kingdom.⁶⁷ Yet the capital had also had a cloth industry since the twelfth century and had many vested interests to defend. The difference with Colchester, which had no drapery production of its own around the middle of the fourteenth century, and only introduced more formal craft regulations in 1407,⁶⁸ was striking. Given the numerous incidents during the 1330s and 1340s, it is not surprising that the reaction of the London cloth workers to the

⁶⁴ John Munro, "Medieval Woollens: Textiles, Technology, and Organisation," in *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles*, ed. David Jenkins (Cambridge, 2003), 181-227, at 197.

⁶⁵ Oldland, *London Clothmaking*, 85.

⁶⁶ Barron, "England and the Low Countries," 12-13.

⁶⁷ John R. Oldland, "Making and Marketing Woollen Cloth in Late-Medieval London," *London Journal* 36, no. 2 (July 2011): 89-108, at 96; John R. Oldland and Eleanor Quinton, "London Merchants' Cloth Exports, 1350-1500," in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles: Volume 7*, eds. Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge, 2011), 111-140, at 111, 122.

⁶⁸ Lambert and Pajic, "Drapery in Exile," 746.

arrival of a new contingent of Crown-sponsored newcomers from overseas was anything but enthusiastic. They chose to voice their discontent in Parliament.

Failure in Parliament and Anti-Flemish Aggression

The oldest known chartered craft in London, the native weavers had received privileges from King Henry II in 1155, stating that they alone had the right to produce cloth in the city.⁶⁹ They were organized in a guild and paid an annual farm to the Crown for their franchises. In 1352, they petitioned the king and his Council in Parliament in protest against the fact that, contrary to their privileges, the alien cloth workers worked outside their guild and did not contribute to their farm. The petition itself is lost, but an entry on the plea rolls makes clear that Edward III thought it better not to have the issue addressed in Parliament. He referred the matter to his Court of the Exchequer, where delegates from both parties were invited to attend. Representatives of the native guild presented their 1155 charter and a resolution by their city's Court of Aldermen made in 1347 that all newcomers should be ruled in the same way as English weavers.⁷⁰ The Flemish delegation reminded the Barons of the Exchequer of Edward's 1337 statute, which guaranteed them unrestricted franchises, and they obtained a stay of proceedings, halting further legal process.⁷¹

The Londoners would not back down so easily. Again in 1352, the Flemish cloth workers petitioned the king and Council complaining that they continued to be harassed by

⁶⁹ For the text of the privileges, see Consitt, *London Weavers' Company*, 180-1.

⁷⁰ For this ruling, see *LBF*, 173.

⁷¹ Verdict Court of Exchequer, 1352, E 13/76, mm. 97-98d, TNA. The entry contains the original text of the petition and its endorsement. For a full transcription, see Thomas Madox, *Firma Burgi, or an Historical Essay Concerning the Cities, Towns and Buroughs of England* (London, 1726), 283-7.

the guild of native weavers. They wanted a confirmation of their freedom to work in England, as promised in 1337, and the authority to elect two of their own men to supervise their work. The response of the Crown, written on the dorse of the document, could hardly be clearer:

Because this petition touches the common profit of all the realm of England and of the lands specified in it, our lord the king, with the assent of the prelates, earls and barons, and other great men in this full parliament, grants for himself and his heirs to all and singular alien cloth workers ... who then resided in this kingdom ... and should thereafter come and abide there and follow their craft ... that they may safely abide in the realm under the king's protection, and may freely follow their craft; without being answerable to the members of the guild of weavers of London, natives, or of other cloth workers of this realm, or liable to pay any sums of money by reason of such guild.⁷²

Not only could the Flemish textile workers organize themselves in any way they preferred, new artisans from overseas were encouraged to join them. On 8 February 1352, the king's decision was enacted on the patent rolls.⁷³

The strong royal endorsement and the references to the interest of the whole realm in Edward's response are all the more remarkable, considering that the Flemings' petition had never even been adopted by the Commons in Parliament.⁷⁴ Why would an isolated request by a specific group of immigrant workers receive such vigorous support from the royal government? Against the background of the earlier development in the Crown's views on

⁷² Petition Alien Weavers of London, 1352, Ancient Petitions, SC 8/110/5463, TNA. See also *PROME*, 5: 62-3.

⁷³ *CPR*, 1350-4, 232.

⁷⁴ This point was also raised by Gwilym Dodd, *Justice and Grace: Private Petitioning and the English Parliament in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2007), 143.

immigration and combined with the referral of the natives' criticisms to the Exchequer the same year, the forceful royal rhetoric in the endorsement makes perfectly good sense, however: what was at stake was not only the private interests of the Flemish weavers in England, but also the Crown's own policy. In the face of the Londoners' persistent resistance, the royal perspective on the immigration of alien workers needed to be expressed more convincingly than ever. To do so, little was more effective than referring to the common profit. In a recent article, Mark Ormrod has shown that already in English political discourse during the fourteenth century, this notion functioned as an exclusive device by which good governance that benefited the material prosperity of the realm was framed.⁷⁵ By adopting the attraction of Flemish cloth workers as part of this programme it was presented as an asset to England's economy that far exceeded the interests of particular groups. To do so as explicitly as in the 1352 endorsement forced even the craft guilds in the country's most powerful city to think twice.

The Crown's endorsement of the Flemish petition had an immediate effect. In October 1352, eight months after the enrolment of the letters patent, an agreement was made between delegations of London's native and alien cloth workers, including exiles John and William Brunhals, Henry Clofhamer, Levin Godhalse, John Kempe, John van Loo, Levin Olivier, Giles Ripekast, John van Somergham, and John atte Were. The English weavers acknowledged the Flemings' freedom to work in the city and promised no longer to attempt to incorporate them within their guild. The Flemish textile workers were prepared to contribute to the annual farm to the Exchequer and agreed to a joint supervision of their looms. They

⁷⁵ W. Mark Ormrod, "'Common Profit' and 'the Profit of the King and Kingdom': Parliament and the Development of Political Language in England, 1250-1450," *Viator* 46, no. 2 (2015), 219-52.

also agreed to refrain from undertaking further legal action against their English colleagues.⁷⁶ The agreement implied the de facto recognition of the alien weavers as a separate guild. From the end of 1352 onwards, the names of their bailiffs, among whom were exiles such as Lambert Funderlynde, John le Gurterre, and Henry Navegher, were recorded regularly in the city's letter books.⁷⁷ The compromise was not the only indication of a rapprochement during these years. In 1356, exile John Kempe from Ghent even obtained the citizenship status he needed to sell retail in the city by joining the guild of native weavers. Three of his sureties were John Payn, Richard atte Boure, and John Bennet, London cloth workers who had brokered the 1352 agreement.⁷⁸ Soon enough, however, the more conciliatory voices within the native guild lost out against the more radical elements. Confronted with the emphatic expression of royal support for the alien cloth workers, the natives abandoned their political action and turned on the immigrants once more.

In a petition of 1377-8, the Flemings would claim that because of the privileges granted to them in 1352, the English had "murdered, wounded, and horribly trampled down" some of their members.⁷⁹ In June 1355, the king addressed a writ to the mayor and sheriffs of London, telling them to intervene. The text referred explicitly to the immigration of the exiles, condemning the molestation of the "men of Flanders ... banished from those parts for adhering to the king."⁸⁰ In July 1359, Edward III had again to forbid the physical aggression against those from the Low Countries pursuing their business in both the city and the suburbs.⁸¹ Only

⁷⁶ Agreement Native and Alien Cloth Workers, 1352, CLA/023/DW/01/80/184, LMA. For a full transcription, see Consitt, *London Weavers' Company*, 188-91.

⁷⁷ *LBG*, 2, 16, 48, 104, 131, 237; *CPMR*, 2: 84.

⁷⁸ Grant of Freedom of City of London to John Kempe, 1356, CLA/023/CP/01/80, 4d, LMA.

⁷⁹ Petition Alien Weavers of London, 1377-8, Ancient Petitions, SC 8/143/7122, TNA.

⁸⁰ *LBG*, 42. *CCR*, 1354-1360, 221.

⁸¹ *LBG*, 109.

four months later, in October 1359, another proclamation against the onslaughts had to be made.⁸² According to a decree by the mayor in 1362, Flemings, Brabanters, and Zeelanders felt so unsafe that they constantly carried knives and other weapons with them.⁸³

In the course of the 1360s, attention in most of the sources temporarily shifted from the violence between native and immigrant cloth workers to the internal problems within the guild of alien weavers in London. For a number of years, disputes increased between Flemings and Brabanters, who may have arrived following Louis of Male's invasion of their duchy in 1356, and between Flemish masters and journeymen.⁸⁴ It would be wrong, however, to consider the struggles within the alien guild and the Anglo-Flemish conflicts as totally unrelated. The native weavers' resistance to the Flemings' self-governance seriously undermined the latter's authority to regulate their craft. When issues transcended the interests of the particular guild, the Flemish weavers even depended on the goodwill of their London rivals. Inspired by the greater opportunities for laborers in post-Plague England, Flemish journeymen, among whom were the exiles John and Peter Pape, and John Tybes, refused to work for less than 7d. a day and threatened their own bailiffs in 1355. The mayor ordered a joint committee of native and alien weavers, including the banished Giles Ripekast, Henry van the Rothe, John van Somergham, and John atte Were, to negotiate about appropriate wages. In the end, the traditional enmity between both groups prevented them from reaching a compromise and the matter was not settled.⁸⁵ Represented by exiles Henry Clofhamer, John Gaunsterman, and John van Wetere, the guild of alien cloth workers had its ordinances

⁸² *LBG*, 112.

⁸³ *LBG*, 150.

⁸⁴ A stronger presence of Brabanters was also attested during these years in Colchester. Lambert and Pajic, "Drapery in Exile," 749.

⁸⁵ *CPMR*, 1: 248.

approved in 1362, and again in 1366,⁸⁶ but, unlike the native weavers, who had enjoyed their private court or “soke” since their first charter in 1155,⁸⁷ was not granted its own jurisdiction. This made it hard for the Flemish bailiffs to control the collective actions of guild members that continued to occur throughout the decade.⁸⁸ In 1369, for example, exiles Peter Crayman and William the Meyr and some other weavers contested the decisions of the bailiffs of the Flemish guild. Several Englishmen, as well as Flemings turned London citizens John Kempe and Jacob van Ackere, were called in to mediate and their judgment needed to be confirmed by the mayor and the aldermen.⁸⁹ Fear of the Londoners’ aggression had not completely disappeared either. In 1364, a number of alien cloth workers, including exiles James Westeland and John de Langford, appeared in the London Court of Husting to obtain an inspeximus confirmation of Edward III’s letters patent of May 1350, which had promised protection against attacks and swift redress in court for all Flemings settling in the realm.⁹⁰ In 1369, when the failure of the English king’s attempts to marry his son to the Count of Flanders’ daughter might have resulted in a climate more favorable to anti-Flemish concerns,⁹¹ the assaults effectively returned. Having “heard by frequent report of several that evil and insult is by the people of the said city daily inflicted on the ... men and the merchants [of Flanders] dwelling there and coming thither”, Edward III once again insisted that bloodshed should stop.⁹²

⁸⁶ Riley, *Memorials*, 306-8, 332.

⁸⁷ George Unwin, *The Gilds and Companies of London* (London, 1925), 43-6.

⁸⁸ Consitt, *London Weavers’ Company*, 43-9; Good, “Alien Clothworkers,” 12-15.

⁸⁹ *LBG*, 250.

⁹⁰ Confirmation Letters Patent Edward III, 1364, CLA/023/DW/93/19, LMA.

⁹¹ J.J.N. Palmer, “England, France, the Papacy and the Flemish Succession, 1361-9,” *Journal of Medieval History* 2, no. 4 (January 1976), 339-64.

⁹² *CCR*, 1369-74, 91.

To interpret the constant attacks by the London weavers in Parliament and in the streets throughout the 1350s and 1360s as a function of general anti-alien sentiment or even of the fear of being outcompeted by the Flemings would be an oversimplification. To fully understand the native textile workers' frustrations, it is essential to take into account the developments in the London cloth market during the second half of the fourteenth century. The Black Death had not reduced the demand for the middling and high-quality types of cloth being produced by the Flemish weavers in the capital. The market for luxury colored textiles may even have expanded, as living standards rose and substantial quantities could be sold to noble households and the royal court. In 1350-1, the king's Great Wardrobe spent 53.8 per cent of its money for drapery purchases on coloreds.⁹³ Flemish exiles also maintained contacts with the London drapers, who monopolized these sales to the court.⁹⁴ In 1367, for example, Arnold Skakpynkyl and Nys van de Vyure from Ghent sued draper Nicholas Rouse for a debt of £9 19s.⁹⁵ During the 1350s, cloths imported from abroad, which were usually the higher-quality varieties, still constituted the majority of textiles sealed by the aulnager in London.⁹⁶ By the second half of the 1370s, when the Flemings were aulnaging vast amounts of fabrics, all but a few of these imports had disappeared.⁹⁷ Edward III's policy of encouraging Flemish craftsmen thus seems to have had an effect.

At the same time, there continued to be a domestic market for rays, the other string to the Flemings' bow. The court's growing interest in cloth dyed in the piece did not

⁹³ Oldland, *London Clothmaking*, 64, n. 14.

⁹⁴ Oldland, "Making and Marketing Woollen Cloth," 94.

⁹⁵ *CPMR*, 2: 270.

⁹⁶ Oldland, *London Clothmaking*, 64-5.

⁹⁷ Particulars of Account of Aulnage, 1374-6, 1376-7, E 101/340/ 22, m. 3; E 101/340/23, mm. 5, 5d, TNA.

significantly affect its demand for striped and checked fabrics until the end of this period.⁹⁸ In 1362-3, the royal Wardrobe still bought 108 rayed cloths, a number only inferior to the 201 long and short coloreds purchased that year. Whereas most of these rays were also supplied by London drapers, one Fleming, Jacob Bone from Ghent, sold twenty-eight directly to the court.⁹⁹ By 1392-5, the relative importance of rayed cloth had dropped compared to that of long and short coloreds, with 134 pieces bought of the former and 872 of the latter, but it remained the Wardrobe's second most sought-after cloth type.¹⁰⁰ Evidence suggests that other wealthy consumers also carried on purchasing rays until at least the end of the fourteenth century.¹⁰¹

There are even indications that a small part of the Flemings' output was exported. Between 1362, the year in which the guild of alien weavers had its first ordinances approved, and 1366, the new category of "cloth of Flemish manufacture" figured among the exported

⁹⁸ Contrary to what is suggested in Eleanor Quinton, "The Drapers and the Drapery Trade of Late Medieval London, c. 1300-c. 1500" (PhD diss, University of London, 2001.), 166-7.

⁹⁹ Part of a Roll of Expenses of the Great Wardrobe, 1362-3, E 101/394/12, TNA.

¹⁰⁰ Roll of Expenses of Great Wardrobe, 1392-5, E 101/402/13, TNA.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, the many fragments of rayed cloth in the late fourteenth-century deposits excavated at London's Castle Baynard or the purchases of rays for the determination of the son of Thomas Holland, half-brother of king Richard II, in 1395. F. Pritchard, "Patterned Cloths from 14th-century London," in *Textiles in Northern Archaeology: Vol. 3*, eds. P. Walton and J.P. Wild (1990), 155-164, at 159; James Edwin Thorold Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England: From the Year after the Oxford Parliament (1259) to the Commencement of the Continental War (1793)*. Vol. 2 (Oxford, 1866), 643-4. Cloth makers in Salisbury also continued to produce high numbers of rays until the early fifteenth century. Eleanor Carus-Wilson, "The Woollen Industry before 1550," in *The Victoria History of the County of Wiltshire: Volume 4*, ed. Elizabeth Crittall (London, 1957), 115-47, at 125, 128; John N. Hare, "Salisbury: The Economy of a Fifteenth-Century Provincial Capital," *Southern History* 31 (2009): 1-26, at 7.

cloth types in London's enrolled petty customs accounts.¹⁰² Unfortunately, there are no particulars of account that allow us to identify the exporters. Banished Flemings dealt with London mercers, who, during this period, were among the leading traders of English cloth abroad.¹⁰³ In 1364, John van Stene, an exile from Ghent, sued mercers John Peutre and Henry Forester for debts of £23 0s. 3d. and £4 17s.¹⁰⁴ The Flemings' woollens may have been sold in Gascony, one of the principal markets for English cloth during the fourteenth century.¹⁰⁵ Cloth produced in England was officially banned from Flanders,¹⁰⁶ but some of the exiles, who benefited from a cheaper and more secure supply of wool than their competitors across the Channel, may have used their ambiguous backgrounds to export to their county of origin anyway. In 1362 John Kempe and Francis Fan Yabek, banished from Ghent and Bruges, were caught by the London searcher for sending two pieces of cloth uncustomed to Flanders.¹⁰⁷

We do have particulars of account detailing the payment of wool customs during these years. From this evidence it appears that, in 1365-6, three exiles also exported raw materials from England. John van Dorme took twenty-seven sacks of wool and 1,440 woolfells out of the country in October 1365, ten sacks of wool in November 1365 and thirteen sacks in

¹⁰² The original reads "panni di Flandria". The translation is Stuart Jenks'. Stuart Jenks, ed., *The Enrolled Customs Accounts (PRO, E356, E372, E364), 1279/80-1508/09 (1523/24). Part 4: E356/9, E35610, E356/11, E356/12, E356/13* (London, 2006), 1061-5.

¹⁰³ Oldland and Quinton, "Cloth Exports," 125. Anne F. Sutton, *The Mercery of London: Trade, Goods and People, 1130-1578* (Aldershot, 2005), 148-50.

¹⁰⁴ *CPMR*, 1: 279.

¹⁰⁵ Oldland and Quinton, "Cloth Exports," 120.

¹⁰⁶ For the Flemish ban on English cloth, see John Munro, "Industrial Protectionism in Medieval Flanders: Urban of National?," in *The Medieval City*, eds. Harry Miskimin, David Herlihy, and A.L. Udovitch (New Haven and London, 1977), 229-68.

¹⁰⁷ *CCR, 1360-1364*, 356; *CFR, 1356-1368*, 193. Both exiles were considered as alien by the English customs administration.

September 1366. Levin Fisker exported eleven sacks of wool in October 1365, John Capelle three sacks in November 1365.¹⁰⁸ The shipment abroad of unshorn woolfells was perfectly compatible with the Flemings' own sale of luxury cloth: they were commonly used for the production of lower-quality fabrics and, until a reorganization of the customs system in 1368, were subject to relatively low tax rates.¹⁰⁹ Yet the customs on the export of wool were exorbitantly high, adding up to thirty-three percent of the cargo's market value for alien exporters.¹¹⁰ Why would van Dorme, Fisker and Capelle, who were charged the alien rates, have paid these duties and supplied producers who may have competed with their own finished products? It must be stressed, however, that, apart from van Dorme's shipment in September 1366, all exports were concentrated in a period of only two months in 1365 and could have been made to compensate for a temporary dip in the Flemings' cloth sales. The only other goods the exiles are known to have traded in England is linen cloth, a Low Countries specialty,¹¹¹ sold by Laurence de Magh and John Rossart to a London citizen in 1367.¹¹²

The fortunes of London's native weavers contrasted sharply with those of the Flemish exiles. During the second quarter of the fourteenth century, the city's English cloth workers had experienced a revival as they had been able to extricate themselves from the dominance of the burellers and technological advancement had enabled them to broaden their range from semi-worsted to cheap, coarse full woollens. The Black Death did reduce the demand for lower-quality cloth, however, although not as much as the drop in the population figures

¹⁰⁸ Particulars of Customs Accounts, 1365-6, E 122/70/18, mm. 1, 1d, 2, 9, TNA.

¹⁰⁹ Terence Henry Lloyd, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1977), 310

¹¹⁰ Eleonora Mary Carus-Wilson and Olive Coleman, *England's Export Trade 1275-1547* (Oxford, 1963), 23.

¹¹¹ Marc Boone, 'Les toiles de lin des Pays-Bas bourguignons sur le marché anglais (fin xive-xvie siècles)', *Publications du Centre Européen d'Etudes Bourguignonnes (XIVe-XVIe s.)* 35 (1995): 61-81.

¹¹² *CPMR*, 2:67.

might suggest.¹¹³ In 1364, the native weavers were also denied the retail sale of their own products, as only drapers now had the right to market cloth in the city. This did not automatically mean these drapers would buy from local cloth workers. In 1351, London's exemption from the Statute of York, which, in 1335, had allowed all merchants to trade freely throughout England,¹¹⁴ was lifted. This enabled provincial weavers, who were able to work with lower costs, to flood the city with their less expensive textiles. While London developed into the kingdom's most important cloth market, its native cloth workers became uncompetitive. Many moved out of the city to escape payment of the farm to the Crown. They elected members to the Common Council, the representative assembly of the city's mysteries, but, dominated by the mercantile guilds, their political influence was limited.¹¹⁵

Switching to the types of cloth in which the Flemings specialized, where demand was sufficient and provincial competition less fierce, might have solved some of the native weavers' problems, but they were unable to do so. The production of rayed cloth required specialist weaving and shearing skills, which they did not have.¹¹⁶ Making coloreds demanded even more specific know-how, mostly in the preparation of the yarn, which, during this period, no English producer had.¹¹⁷ The natives' lack of capital and control over the complete production cycle also prevented them from following up on the preferences of the end customers who specified the colors and other specifications of the rays, and from imposing

¹¹³ John Munro, "The Origins of the English 'New Draperies': The Resurrection of an Old Flemish Industry, 1270-1570," in *The New Draperies in the Low Countries and England*, ed. N.B. Harte (New York, 1998), 35-127, at 67-8.

¹¹⁴ *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 270-1.

¹¹⁵ Caroline M. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People, 1200-1500* (Oxford, 2004), 220-1; Oldland, *London Clothmaking*, 67-78; Quinton, *Drapers and Drapery Trade*, 113-17.

¹¹⁶ Munro, "Textiles, Technology, and Organisation," 183, 211.

¹¹⁷ Oldland, *London Clothmaking*, 62-3.

the very high quality standards needed for manufacturing colored cloth. This explains, at least in part, why the London weavers pursued their claims to supervision of the guild of alien cloth workers with such determination: with the Flemings' incorporation came their expertise, their capital, and their unique selling proposition. The Flemish weavers may already have been refusing to hire English apprentices and servants as they would do in the late fifteenth century in order to avoid the dissemination of their skills.¹¹⁸

When, in a petition to the king in 1376, the native weavers deplored that the “Flemings, Brabanters, and other aliens have at present, and for a long time have had, the great part of the said mystery”,¹¹⁹ they were, thus, not principally targeting a group of artisans who had conquered their segment of the market: the Flemish weavers produced different kinds of cloth and provided no direct competition. They were expressing their desperation at trends in the cloth making business in London after the middle of the fourteenth century, which had turned out to be very detrimental to them, and, most of all, the lack of support from the English royal government. The incorporation of a group of exiled immigrant workers who had fared much better could have given them access to new sections of the market and have ameliorated their problems with the payment of the farm. For this to have happened, they needed Edward III's backing. Yet the English king, who argued to work for the common profit of his entire realm, continued to ignore the legitimate claims of the native weavers and preferred to court the Flemings.

The Petitions War of 1376-8

During the second half of the 1370s, a number of changes provided the native cloth workers with a context that must have given them new hope of finding a political solution for their

¹¹⁸ John R. Oldland, “London's Trade in the Time of Richard III,” *The Ricardian*, 24 (2014): 1-30, at 16.

¹¹⁹ Petition Native Weavers of London, 1376, Ancient Petitions, SC 8/43/2127, TNA.

problems. Most importantly, the once solid regime of King Edward III, for four decades a determined sponsor of the guild of Flemish artisans, had all but collapsed. Struggling with ailing health, the monarch no longer had the authority to deal with the growing frustrations within the realm, which erupted dramatically in the so-called Good Parliament of 1376.¹²⁰ Secondly, the breakdown of the Truce of Bruges in 1375 and the threat of a French invasion had created an atmosphere in which the presence of substantial numbers of aliens in the kingdom was no longer taken for granted: some even petitioned that all Frenchmen resident in the realm should be expelled in order to protect national security.¹²¹ Finally, since 1371 petitions which promoted the private interests of specific groups or communities had been incorporated more easily into those presented by the Commons in Parliament than had been the case before, thus securing a better chance of receiving a definitive answer.¹²²

In 1376 the native weavers of London petitioned the king in Parliament, repeating the claims they had made at the start of the 1350s: whereas his progenitors had granted them a charter that gave their guild alone the right to practice their craft in the city, Edward III had allowed Flemings, Brabanters, and other aliens who had newly come into England to do the same. They therefore asked that the aliens' charter of 1352 be annulled and theirs confirmed or that they be discharged from the annual payments for their fee.¹²³ Probably no decision had been reached when Edward died in June 1377, so two near-duplicate petitions were submitted to the new king Richard II later in the year.¹²⁴ The Flemish weavers reacted and sent a counter-request to the young monarch and his Council, asking for the confirmation of their

¹²⁰ George Holmes, *The Good Parliament* (Oxford, 1975), 100-58; W. Mark Ormrod, *Edward III* (New Haven, 2011), 524-76.

¹²¹ Lambert and Ormrod, "Friendly Foreigners," 15-16; Lambert and Ormrod, "Matter of Trust," 225-6.

¹²² Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 146.

¹²³ Petition Native Weavers of London, 1376, Ancient Petitions, SC 8/43/2127, TNA.

¹²⁴ Petitions Native Weavers of London, 1377, Ancient Petitions, SC 8/123/6147; SC 8/143/7128, TNA.

1352 charter.¹²⁵ The Crown's decision was recorded on the dorse of one of the native cloth workers' petitions and can only have disappointed them. Whereas other complaints about the presence of immigrants in the kingdom were discussed at the Bad Parliament of January to March 1377 and the request to expel all French residents was even granted,¹²⁶ the bill about the alien weavers found much less support. It was sent into the Chancery, where a special tribunal would summon the Flemings and Brabanters and investigate their 1352 charter.¹²⁷ Even though this was not an uncommon procedure,¹²⁸ it seems obvious that the Crown was not particularly keen to address the criticisms of its economic immigration policy in Parliament. Twice the London weavers had asked the king to restrict the privileges of the immigrant artisans: in 1352 their requests had been side-tracked to the Exchequer, in 1376 to the Chancery. The contrast with the aliens' petition of 1352, which, despite the lack of parliamentary backing, had received the strongest possible royal endorsement and had been granted by letters patent, was telling.

We have no direct documentary evidence as to what happened subsequently, but we do know that the Flemings rallied additional support. Later in 1377 or in 1378, they sent a petition to Richard II's uncle John of Gaunt.¹²⁹ They explained how the English cloth workers

¹²⁵ Petition Alien Weavers of London, 1377, Ancient Petitions, SC 8/143/7122, TNA.

¹²⁶ *PROME*, 6: 48-50. See also Lambert and Ormrod, "Friendly Foreigners," 15-17; Lambert and Ormrod, "Matter of Trust," 225-6.

¹²⁷ Petition Native Weavers of London, 1377, Ancient Petitions, SC 8/123/6147, TNA.

¹²⁸ For the deferral of petitions outside parliament, see Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 82-5.

¹²⁹ Petition Alien Weavers of London, 1377-1378, Ancient Petitions, SC 8/102/5061, TNA. Petitions in TNA's SC 8 series are undated and dates need to be derived from internal and contextual evidence. Gwilym Dodd, "Parliamentary Petitions? The Origins and Provenance of the 'Ancient Petitions' (SC 8) in the National Archives," in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, eds. W. Mark Ormrod, Gwilym Dodd, and Anthony

were trying to have their charter, granted by John's father Edward, withdrawn in the Chancery and they asked for his help. The Flemings must have considered him an obvious champion for their cause. Even though he was excluded from the Regency Council, John of Gaunt held considerable influence in the kingdom during the minority of his nephew.¹³⁰ Related to the house of Hainault through his mother, he also cherished close links with the princes of the Low Countries and it was exactly during this period that he hoped to exploit these connections in order to secure a military alliance. Gaunt, too, incurred the anger of the London citizens in a dispute over their liberties, in 1377.¹³¹ According to the author of the *Anonimale Chronicle*, the Londoners vented their frustrations about his actions by circulating the highly insulting rumor that the Ghent-born prince was the son of a Flemish butcher rather than of Edward III and "loved Flemings twice as much as Englishmen."¹³² It may be significant that these allegations were made at the same time as the petition in which the Flemish weavers complained to Gaunt about the maneuvers of their London rivals. Had the news about the Flemings' attempt at obtaining his collaboration gone public and added to the existing anger towards him in the capital, or did the Flemish textile workers approach him exactly because

Musson (York, 2009), 12-46, at 15-16. This request refers to the procedure in the Chancery, so should be dated after the native weavers' petitions and before the end of the investigation in March 1380.

¹³⁰ Gwilym Dodd, "Richard II and the Fiction of the Majority Rule," in *The Royal Minorities of Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Charles Beem (New York, 2008), 103-59.

¹³¹ Anthony Goodman, *John of Gaunt: The Exercise of Princely Power in Fourteenth-Century Europe* (Harlow, 1992), 59-62, 179-85; Pamela Nightingale, "Capitalists, Crafts and Constitutional Change in Late Fourteenth-Century London," *Past and Present* 124 (August 1989): 3-35, at 20-2.

¹³² Galbraith, *Anonimale Chronicle*, 104-5. New doubts on Gaunt's pedigree were cast in 2014, after DNA evidence pointed out a false-paternity event in the genealogy descending from Edward III. For the significance of such an event, see W. Mark Ormrod, "The DNA of Richard III: False Paternity and the Royal Succession in Later Medieval England," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* (forthcoming).

the conflict had highlighted his links with the Low Countries? Without a more precise dating of the Flemish petition, it is impossible to say.

The petitions war was also fought on the front of political language. Both in their request to Richard II and the one to John of Gaunt, the Flemings cleverly underlined the wider importance of their case by adopting the Crown's own rhetoric of immigration for the common profit.¹³³ In the earlier petition they asked for a confirmation of their privileges, "so they could use their mystery so well for the profit of the realm as for themselves."¹³⁴ In the latter one the very last words were to reassure John that they were only interested in the "profit of the realm."¹³⁵ Whereas the notion of common profit was also eagerly embraced by others during this period,¹³⁶ the native cloth workers never appealed to the wider interests of the kingdom. Their requests showed more concern for their own material benefit, emphasizing how the rejection of their earlier petitions had resulted in the "great impoverishment of their estate."¹³⁷

In anticipation of a verdict from the Chancery, the English weavers tried to mobilize political action in London. At the Parliament of October 1377, it had been decided that no alien in England should run a hostel and, in a further attempt to curb the mobility of laborers

¹³³ The Flemings had already petitioned the mayor of London "for the common profit of the land and of the city and for the saving of their said trade" in 1362. Riley, *Memorials*, 306.

¹³⁴ Petition Alien Weavers of London, 1377, Ancient Petitions, SC 8/143/7122, TNA.

¹³⁵ Petition Alien Weavers of London, 1377-1378, Ancient Petitions, SC 8/102/5061, TNA.

¹³⁶ W. Mark Ormrod, "The Good Parliament of 1376: Commons, Communes and 'Common Profit' in Fourteenth-Century English Politics," in *Comparative Perspectives on History and Historians: Essays in Memory of Bryce Lyon (1920-2007)*, eds. David Nicholas, Bernard S. Bachrach and James M. Murray (Kalamazoo, 2012), 179-82.

¹³⁷ Petition Native Weavers of London, 1377, Ancient Petitions, SC 8/123/6147, TNA.

after the Black Death, a stricter control of the wages earned by servants was imposed.¹³⁸ The native cloth workers now asked the London Common Council to entrust them with the supervision of the earnings of immigrant journeymen in the cloth industry and to make sure that no alien weavers were hostel keepers. In language that is more explicit than that used earlier and betrays growing frustration, they left little doubt who the real targets of their actions were: “the foreigners and strangers being for the most part exiled from their own country as notorious malefactors, and unwilling to place themselves under the rule of the free weavers.” The Common Council made clear to the weavers that no changes could be made until malpractices were actually observed.¹³⁹ Dominated by the mercantile mysteries, which had no interest in restricting competition among the city’s producers,¹⁴⁰ the assembly’s support for the native weavers’ particular concerns was, obviously, limited.

There are indications that, also during this period, the native cloth workers’ political failures resulted in physical aggression against their Flemish colleagues. On 11 April 1377, Katherine, the English wife of the Flemish weaver Gilbert Strynger, sued London weaver Richard Bone in the King’s Bench for the murder of her husband. Bone was summoned to appear in person on the following octave of St Martin (November 1377). He did not show up and after failing to do so twice more, he was outlawed.¹⁴¹ On 19 April 1379, however, Bone bought a royal pardon for the murder and had his penalty cancelled. Although the writ delivered by the Privy Seal Office, which was usually based on the supplicant’s petition, specified that Strynger was a Fleming, the entry on the King’s Bench plea rolls did not do

¹³⁸ *PROME*, 6: 36-7, 38.

¹³⁹ *LBH*, 94.

¹⁴⁰ Nightingale, “Capitalists, Crafts and Constitutional Change,” 17-24.

¹⁴¹ Verdict King’s Bench, 1378, KB 27/469, m. 50, TNA.

so.¹⁴² In the context of the rivalries between the two groups of workers, Bone found it expedient to emphasize his victim's origins in order to obtain mercy.

On 4 March 1380, the outcome of the Chancery investigation was enacted on the patent rolls. The objections of the native cloth workers were rejected once more and the privileges of the Flemish weavers, including the right to work outside the Londoners' guild, were confirmed.¹⁴³ An agreement between both groups about the payment of the farm and the supervision of the looms was made a few days later, but, again, was largely ignored.¹⁴⁴ On 13 June 1381, just fourteen months later, the bloody massacre which we have discussed at the beginning of this article took place: as the Peasants' Revolt raged over London, up to forty Flemings were taken out of St Martin Vintry, situated halfway between the churches where Flemish and Brabantine weavers usually held their congregations, and were slaughtered. In the weeks and months that followed, collective pardons were granted absolving those who had participated in the rebellion of their punishment.¹⁴⁵ They included groups of London's native weavers,¹⁴⁶ the artisans who, during the three decades that led up to the events, had continuously denounced the liberties of the Flemish cloth workers, had repeatedly attacked them physically, and, one year earlier, had come to the sobering realization that their problems with the aliens would never be solved politically. One of those pardoned, on 23 June

¹⁴² Pardon Richard Bone, 23 June 1381, C 81/460/430, TNA. See also *CPR*, 1377-81, 340.

¹⁴³ *CPR*, 1377-81, 452.

¹⁴⁴ Disputes would continue in subsequent years and throughout much of the fifteenth century. In 1406, for example, the guild of native cloth workers complained again that the Flemish weavers did not pay their farm. *PROME*, 8: 399-400. Only in 1497 did London's native and alien weavers come to a "final peace" and unite in one guild. Consitt, *London Weavers' Company*, 58-60.

¹⁴⁵ See Helen Lacey, "Grace for the Rebels: The Role of the Royal Pardon in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381," *Journal of Medieval History* 34, no. 1 (March 2008): 36-63.

¹⁴⁶ *CPR*, 1385-9, 280; 1389-92, 75, 290.

1381, or only nine days after the bloodshed in Vintry Ward, was Richard Bone,¹⁴⁷ the man who had murdered Flemish weaver Gilbert Strynger in 1377.

Conclusions: London's Native Cloth Workers and the Government of England

Following the arrival of limited numbers of artisans from the Low Countries in earlier decades, the English Crown facilitated the immigration of unprecedentedly high numbers of skilled cloth workers banished from the county of Flanders during the 1350s. Most of them settled in London, where they withstood the decline in the city's cloth manufacture, substituted their fabrics for those imported from abroad and even produced textiles for export. Yet the activities of these newcomers clashed violently with the capital's existing world of chartered freedoms and century-old privileges. Already in 1155, the guild of London weavers had been granted the exclusive right to control drapery production within the city. Sharply affected by the shrinking demand for lower-quality cloth and by the increasing competition from provincial manufacturers, they believed that the supervision of the aliens' activities and the latter's contribution to the guild's farm to the Crown would help them to overcome the crisis. From 1352 onwards, the native weavers resorted to Parliament, the usual channel of political communication, to convince the Crown of the need to obtain the incorporation of the Flemish cloth makers into their guild. But the English king, claiming that the unhindered work of the immigrants benefited the common profit of the whole realm in a way that transcended the interests of any particular group of workers, for over two decades remained deaf to the natives' concerns and consistently blocked every attempt at discussion even when requests to restrict the activities of other alien residents were granted. Every time the London

¹⁴⁷ *CPR*, 1385-9, 280; 1389-92, 75. See also John L. Leland, "Aliens in the Pardons of Richard II," in *Fourteenth Century England: Volume 4*, ed. J.S. Hamilton (Woodbridge, 2006), 136-45, at 140-1. Bone received another pardon for robbery in 1397. *CPR*, 1396-9, 140.

weavers were sent back to square one, they reacted by using violence against the Flemish cloth workers, sometimes resulting in fatal casualties.

There are, thus, very strong reasons to place the bloody massacre of the Flemings in the capital in June 1381 in the context of the English weavers' mounting aggravation. The attacks happened in a neighborhood heavily frequented by cloth workers from Flanders only months after the native guild's ultimate attempt at reaching a political solution had been rejected by the Crown. If every other breakdown of the English weavers' negotiations with the royal government during the previous thirty years had provoked physical aggression against their Flemish colleagues, then why would the verdict of March 1380, which was more definitive than any decision before, have been met with acquiescence? The first disturbances following the king's rejection in which London's native weavers are known to have participated was the Peasants' Revolt, when the murder of the Flemings in St Martin Vintry took place. Among those pardoned for their involvement in these events was a native cloth worker convicted for the killing of a Flemish weaver in the years that preceded the rebellion.

What links the economic hostility and the upheavals of the Peasants' Revolt most closely together, however, is the nature of the English cloth workers' discontent. Rather than being difficult to connect with the causes of the rising, the native weavers' frustrations instead had a lot in common with the feelings that drove the rebels in 1381. Admittedly, the cloth workers' concerns were quite specific, but so, too, were a number of other issues that erupted during the rebellion. One of the more striking features of the Peasants' Revolt was exactly the fact that the general turmoil allowed more specific, localized tensions to descend into violence. In Cambridge, inhabitants displeased with the university's privileges and the way in

which its clergy staff dominated the town ransacked Corpus Christi College.¹⁴⁸ In York, two rivaling factions within the city's political elites fought each other.¹⁴⁹

The London weavers shared with all of the 1381 rebels, both those engaged in local issues and those inspired by matters that concerned the whole realm, a profound dissatisfaction with the ways in which the governing classes, the royal government in particular, dealt with a number of fundamental problems that threatened their interests. None of these feelings were new at the beginning of the 1380s but all had been fermenting for several decades without ever being adequately addressed. Many had manifested themselves more openly during the second half of the 1370s, when Edward III had lost control over the government. Like most of the problems that were at the heart of the Peasants' Revolt, the questions that had emerged during the conflict between London's native and Flemish weavers would not immediately disappear after 1381.¹⁵⁰ The tensions between the rights of the kingdom's native population and the privileges accorded to groups of newcomers would surface many times more in the decades that followed, both in the cloth making business and elsewhere.¹⁵¹ Resentment over the treatment of immigrant artisan labor would result in riots during the second half of the fifteenth century,¹⁵² as it did, this article has argued, in 1381. Economic immigration and its impact on the material prosperity of the realm had become a

¹⁴⁸ Dunn, *Great Rising*, 127-9.

¹⁴⁹ Christian D. Liddy, "Urban Conflict in Late-Fourteenth-Century England: The Case of York in 1380-1," *English Historical Review*, 118, no. 475 (February 2003), 1-32.

¹⁵⁰ W. Mark Ormrod, "The Peasants' Revolt and the Government of England," *Journal of British Studies* 29, no. 1 (January 1990), 1-30.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, the debates leading up to the introduction of the Hosting Law at the end of the 1430s. Helen Bradley, ed., *The Views of the Hosts of Alien Merchants, 1440-1444* (London, 2012), i-xlix.

¹⁵² See the attacks, again on Flemings, in London in 1468. James L. Bolton, ed., *The Alien Communities of London in the Fifteenth Century: The Subsidy Rolls of 1440 & 1483-4* (Stamford, 1998), 1.

key issue on England's political agenda, and they would remain so for the rest of the medieval period.